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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02

INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 AF-06 MMO-01 EB-07 AID-05 ACDA-05 /093 W

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R 291215Z OCT 75

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1948

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 14393

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: IN, UK, XO, PFOR

SUBJ: INDIAN LEADERS LAUD DEMOCRACY AT COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY
CONFERENCE

SUMMARY. THE PRESIDENT AND PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA STRESSED INDIA'S COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRACY IN SPEECHES OCTOBER 28 TO SOME THREE HUNDRED DELEGATES GATHERED IN NEW DELHI FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE. THE FORMAL SPEECHES ASIDE, SOME OF THE DELEGATES THEN DEBATED DIEGO GARCIA IN THE FIRST WORKING SESSION OF THE SEVEN-DAY CONFERENCE. END SUMMARY.

1. BOTH INDIAN PRESIDENT FAKHRUDDIN ALI AHMED AND PRIME MINISTER GANDHI USED THE OPENING SESSION OF THE COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE IN DELHI TO REAFFIRM INDIA'S CONTINUING COMMITMENT TO DEMOCRATIC AND PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS. INAUGURATING THE OCTOBER 28 SESSION, PRESIDENT AHMED DECLARED THAT BECAUSE OF INDIA'S IMMENSE SIZE, POPULATION AND DIVERSITIES, "DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT AND ALL THAT IT IMPLIES IS NOT JUST A CONSTITUTIONAL PRESCRIPTION (FOR INDIA) BUT IS THE MOST ENDURING FOUNDATION FOR A VIABLE NATIONAL FRAMEWORK." PERHAPS ALLUDING TO THE POSSIBILITY OF FUTURE CHANGES

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IN THE INDIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM, PRESIDENT AHMED ALSO

NOTED THAT PARLIAMENTARY INSTITUTIONS ARE UNDER CONSTANT REVIEW THROUGHOUT THE WORLD AND "A MEASURE OF CONSCIOUS REFORM" HAD BEEN INTRODUCED IN RECENT YEARS.

2. IN A LENGTHY ADDRESS DRAWING ON THE WRITINGS OF MAHATMA GANDHI AND NEHRU, PRIME MINISTER GANDHI EXPLAINED THAT THE INVOLVEMENT OF SO MANY MILLIONS IN INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT MADE INEVITABLE INDIA'S CHOICE OF "PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRACY ON THE BROADEST BASE" AS ITS FORM OF GOVERNMENT. THE DETERMINING FACTORS WERE THE NON-VIOLENT NATURE OF THE STRUGGLE, A PREFERENCE FOR PEACEFUL AND ORDERLY CHANGE AND A CONVICTION THAT THE PEOPLE MUST HAVE THE DECIDING VOICE. AT THE SAME TIME THE PRIME MINISTER STRESSED THAT DEMOCRACY IS A GENERIC TERM WHOSE "FORMS VARY IN EACH COUNTRY IN LIGHT OF ITS OWN HISTORY AND NATIONAL CHARACTER, ITS SIZE, THE DIVERSITY OR HOMOGENEITY OF ITS POPULATION, THE STATE OF ITS ECONOMY", ETC. POINTING OUT THAT CONSTITUTIONS ARE NOT STATIC AND DEMOCRACY IS NOT RIGID, MRS. GANDHI QUOTED HER FATHER'S CAUTIONING WORDS TO THE MEMBERS OF THE INDIAN CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY ON INDEPENDENCE EVE IN 1947 THAT "IT MAY BE THAT THE CONSTITUTION THIS HOUSE MAY FRAME MAY NOT SATISFY...FREE INDIA. THIS HOUSE CANNOT BIND TOWN THE NEXT GENERATION..." WITHOUT HINTING AT WHAT CHANGES SHE FORESEES IN INDIA'S FUTURE, MRS. GANDHI WENT ON TO SAY THAT WHILE INDIA WAS AWARE OF SYSTEMS WHICH SUCCEEDED IN ACCELERATING ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH REGIMENTATION, "WE CHOSE THE MORE DIFFICULT PATH OF CHANGE THROUGH CIVIL LIBERTIES". THE PRIME MINISTER CLAIMED THERE WAS NO SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCE IN ECONOMIC GROWTH BETWEEN INDIA AND AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES.

3. REFERRING TO THE EVENTS LEADING UP TO THE EMERGENCY, MRS. GANDHI SPOKE OF THE NEED FOR VIGILANCE IN ORDER TO DEVELOP CONSENSUS AND ORDER IN A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM. MEASURES FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION, SUCH AS ARE REQUIRED IN A DEVELOPING COUNTRY, ARE BOUND TO UPSET ONE SECTION OR ANOTHER OF THE POPULATION. FURTHERMORE, THE INABILITY TO ACCEDE TO POWER BY DEMOCRATIC MEANS MAY LEAD SOME PARTIES TO TURN TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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EXTRA OR UNCONSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES. THE PRIME MINISTER SAID THAT IT THEN BECOMES "AN ONEROUS IF PAINFUL DUTY TO COUNTER THEM BY CONSTITUTIONAL REMEDIES". COMMENTING THAT THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC PROBLEMS TODAY ARE FAR MORE COMPLEX THAN WHEN THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS OF LIBERALISM AND MARXISM WERE DEVELOPED, THE PRIME MINISTER NOTED THERE IS EVEN DEBATE IN THE US AND BRITAIN ABOUT THE CAPACITY OF DEMOCRACY TO WITHSTAND

THE NEW ECONOMIC PRESSURES.

4. WHILE PRESIDENT AHMED WAS FULL OF PRAISE FOT THE
COMMWEALTH IN HIS OPENING SPEECH AND CITED "DEMOCRATIC
GOVERNMENT" AS ONE OF THE COMMON BONDS LINKING MEMBER-
STATES, THE PRIME MINISTER MORE RESERVEDLY COMMENTED
ON ITS VOLUNTARY NATURE AND NOTED "IT IS NOT BOUND BY
ANY STATED OR UNSTATED POLITICAL OBLIGATIONS." SHE
ACKNOWLEDGED THAT IT HAS PROVED A "USEFUL FORUM" FOR
THE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS.

5. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE AFTERNOON SESSION
OF THE FIRST DAY PRODUCED A DEBATE ON DIEGO GARCIA. THE
HEAD OF THE INDIAN DELEGATION, MINISTER FOR WORKS
RAGHURAMAIAH, LED THE ATTACK AND WAS SUPPORTED BY
SPOKESMEN FROM GUYANA, MAURITIUS, BANGLADESH, SRI LANKA
AS WELL AS UK LABOR MP SILVERMAN, WHO CHARACTERIZED
THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE BASE AS "MORALLY WRONG AND
POLITICALLY FOOLISH". THE HEAD OF THE BRITISH DELEGATION
LORD SHEPHERD AND MP JAMES JOHNSON DISPUTED ALLEGATIONS
THAT DIEGO GARCIA WOULD BE A NUCLEAR FACILITY, AND THE
LATTER REPORTEDLY SAID THE CONFERENCE SHOULD CONDEMN,
IF AT ALL, BOTH THE US AND THE USSR.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: POLICIES, DEMOCRACY, SPEECHES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 OCT 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975NEWDE14393
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750375-0824
From: NEW DELHI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19751010/aaaaaike.tel
Line Count: 139
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <25 JUN 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <17 NOV 2003 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
06 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: INDIAN LEADERS LAUD DEMOCRACY AT COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE
TAGS: PFOR, IN, UK, XO, COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFEREN, (GANDHI, INDIRA), (AHMED, FAKHRUDDIN ALI)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 06 JUL 2006